

# Farmers Advised to Study Consumers

Lane Palmer, editor of the Farm Journal, made the following comments about farming today before the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in August. The meeting in Oregon was attended by Arnold G. Lueck and Jay W. Irwin, associate county agents. Palmer said:

We still have a long way to go in getting the average farmer actively interested in con-

sumer preferences for his product. I wish that every farmer could have the experience of running a roadside stand. Agriculture cannot possibly reach its potential until every producer becomes a keen student of consumer preferences and an enterprising salesman in satisfying those preferences.

As soon as farmers shift their focus from the crops or livestock they prefer to producing

the things that consumers prefer, it's amazing what happens. One of my favorite examples is John Bintz, a young Michigan farmer who converted his father's small apple orchard into a major recreational center. Even though the orchard was several miles from a main highway, John believed that he could attract city people out to buy their apples at the orchard. So he began promoting by advertising in the local papers. He soon saw the opportunities for selling more than just apples, so he added a cider mill. His mother had long been noted for her good homemade bread. He had her try substituting cider for the water in mixing the dough and introduced their unique brand of cider bread.

John saw that coming out to the orchard was an outing for the whole family, so he began offering candied apples for the kids. Then he noted that the wives were sitting in the cars while the husbands and the kids did the buying, so he put in a gift shop for the ladies. His labor force grew to the point where it became a problem to recruit help for just three or four months each fall. He began wondering how he could extend his season into the winter. The most promising idea was to put in a ski run — except his area was as flat as the Kansas plains. John literally moved a mountain: He scooped enough dirt out of his flat land to build a nice ski slope — and in the process created a lake for ice skating in the winter and swimming, boating and fishing in the summer.

Notice that every step in John's business expansion was guided by his knowledge of people and what they wanted. I wish that more farmers saw this opportunity to do what we call "farm the city people." For farmers own or control most of the land that can satisfy city

people's yen for the great outdoors.

In fact, city people would like to do more than just go out into the countryside for their recreation. They'd like to go out there to live. A recent Gallup Poll showed that 56 per cent of the people would prefer to live in a rural area and another 25 per cent prefer living in small cities. Yet nearly all of the recent growth in our population has taken place in the large urban areas. Government planners and the people who are closest to the problems of our large cities have begun to doubt whether any amount of federal money can once more make our cities habitable.

You know how the cycle goes. A city finds that it has a severe unemployment problem. So the answer is to bring in a new industry — or failing that — a new government installation. Ideally, they want to locate it near the area of the unemployed, which is usually near the center of the city. What happens if they are successful and build the new plant? More traffic congestion; more trash to pollute the streets and smoke to pollute the air; more crime; and all too often, more unemployment.

Working in a large city but traveling in the countryside, as I do, affords a real opportunity to see the contrasts. It's ironic that city people should be so much more concerned about pesticides than are farm people, but it's very logical. Quite literally, city people have fouled their own nests and they assume that the same thing is happening out in the countryside.

We at Farm Journal see no real alternative for our cities than to stop the continuing migration from country to city and, if possible, reverse it. How can we do it? By bringing to the countryside the things it has lacked: water systems, sewers, better schools, libraries, cultural centers and jobs — especially jobs. Bad as the cities are, they still appear to offer more to some rural residents than does the small town. So they leave.

I know there is a temptation to say good riddance, but it isn't riddance. Country people must still help support many of these refugees, through taxes, even after they have moved to the cities. And as we all know, it's much more expensive to support them in the cities than it is out in the country.

We've now had two decades of experience with rural development, and by now it's apparent rural areas cannot be developed from Washington. As the Task Force on Rural Development said in its recent report "Rural Development cannot start unless the local people want it. And it cannot succeed

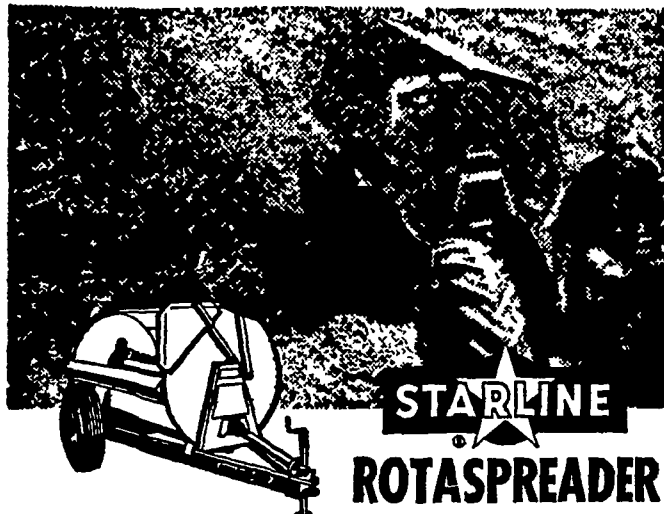
unless local leaders aggressively promote it."

We have been pushing the rural development idea in the pages of Farm Journal this year because we think it's the most promising of all farm programs. It helps farmers by making jobs for farm people — especially the young people that we'd like to keep in rural areas. It provides farmers with a nearby market, making it possible for more of them to sell direct and pocket more of the profit. And finally, country towns with a healthy balance of farm, industry and business can provide better schools, better recreation and a wider selection of goods for farmers who live nearby.

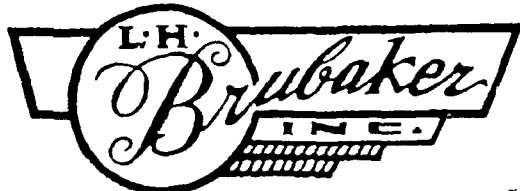
What I am saying is that all phases of our national life are now so interwoven that our problems are indivisible. Low income in farm areas today becomes unemployment in the city after the family has migrated. Poverty and pollution in the city today shows up as higher taxes in the countryside tomorrow.

For several years now we in agriculture have talked longingly of the need to improve our public relations. As is a new paint job will cover up all the old dents and scratches. Our society is now too open for subterfuge. New Jersey fruit and vegetable growers did their cause no good the other day when they posted "no trespassing" signs to keep the press from interviewing their migrant workers. As a member of the press, I can tell them that trespassing signs won't keep an enterprising newsman from getting his (Continued on Page 13)

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